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Ministry of Education

AGREEMENT SUPPORTS ABBOTSFORD ABORIGINAL STUDENTS

ABBOTSFORD – Abbotsford-Mount Lehman MLA Mike de Jong and Abbotsford-Clayburn MLA John van Dongen joined Aboriginal leaders and Abbotsford school district officials today to sign an Aboriginal education enhancement agreement to help improve Aboriginal student achievement.

"This agreement serves as a guide and will help the school district and Aboriginal communities identify and address the needs of Aboriginal students so that all students can achieve their best," said de Jong.

The school district worked closely with Aboriginal communities and the Ministry of Education to develop the agreement. The agreement has four goals for Aboriginal learners, which are to increase:

- The number of students meeting expectations in reading;
- School completion rates;
- Cultural pride; and
- The sense of belonging for students in school.

"By providing support for Abbotsford Aboriginal students in a number of areas of their school life, including academics, arts, athletics, culture and language, we are ensuring students have a positive educational experience and a sense of belonging," said van Dongen.

In addition to the goals, the Abbotsford school district focuses on Aboriginal culture, mentoring, early literacy, and leadership. Several programs have been developed in the district to support Aboriginal students in the following ways:

- An Elders-in-the-classroom program where Elders go into classrooms throughout the year to provide cultural presentations;
- A program for at-risk students where district staff work with at-risk students to provide support and create positive relationships;
- Elementary school reading programs where teachers' assistants take 30 minutes a day to assist students with reading; and
- A number of leadership initiatives in which districts work together to provide leadership training for students.

"The signing of this agreement demonstrates that our government is fulfilling its commitment to develop new relationships with First Nations," said Education Minister Shirley Bond. "We are working together with Aboriginal communities and school districts to improve student achievement while preserving their culture."

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There are approximately 1,750 Aboriginal students in the Abbotsford district this year, about nine per cent of the district's total student enrolment. The district serves the Sumas First Nation, Matsqui First Nation, Metis and Inuit people and other First Nations living off-reserve. The district lies within the shared traditional territories of the Sto:lo Nation.

"The enhancement agreement, developed by the Abbotsford school district and our Aboriginal communities, is a powerful framework for Aboriginal student success," said Perry Smith, district principal for Aboriginal education. "This agreement was designed so that all parties involved are able to move in one direction to support student learning. I believe the enhancement agreement is a positive step towards helping our students grow as learners."

Abbottsford is the 33rd school district to sign an Aboriginal education enhancement agreement. These agreements support the Province's Pacific Leadership Agenda to build new relationships with First Nations, and to close gaps in health, housing, education and economic opportunities. Enhancement agreements are one component of the Province's strategy to improve Aboriginal student achievement. Other components include the new First Nations education jurisdiction agreement and developing Aboriginal content for K-12 curriculum.

The Province is investing an estimated $51.1 million – $1,014 per student – for Aboriginal education in 2007-08. The funds are used to support Aboriginal language and culture programs, student support service programs, and other localized Aboriginal education programs.

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